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THE WINE OF GOD

A Spiritual Study of Our Lord's First Miracle

BY

SHIRLEY C. HUGHSON, O.H.C.

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To

JOHN KERSHAW, D.D.

AN OFFERING

OF LOVE

FROM

A GRATEFUL SON

ST. JOHN ii. 1-11.

AND the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: and both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

THE WINE OF GOD

CHAPTER I

I. With the Sons of Men

BEING perfect Man, our Lord was essentially a social being. He found a constant joy in the companionship of His fellow-men. His life exemplified at every turn what the Holy Spirit said of Him of old, that He rejoiced "in the habitable part of his earth," and that His "delights were with the sons of men."[1]

In our day when it is so necessary to insist upon the Deity of our Lord, we sometimes forget that it is equally important to insist upon His complete and perfect Humanity. If He constantly in the pages of the Gospels asserts His Divinity, in the same Gospels do we find

[1] Prov. 8. 31.

the record of His Humanity, a Humanity normal, warm and loving, full of all that tone and spirit which makes human nature, even in its fallen state, the most irresistibly attractive thing in all God's beautiful creation.

Our Lord had in Him none of the spirit of the recluse. Although men, even those nearest and dearest to Him, so persistently misunderstood Him, yet He infinitely preferred to endure the pain of this, rather than withdraw Himself from those He loved. True, we find Him from time to time going into the deserts for communion with His Father, or for contending with Satan.

Again, there were His long nights of prayer, but always with the reddening dawn we find Him awaiting His disciples by the dim seashore, coming to them walking on the waters, or ready at the temple gate to instruct the gathering throngs, and to heal the souls and bodies of the men He loved so much.

Nor was it only among those who were suffering that He moved. Being just what He was, it might seem quite natural to have found Him in the haunts of suffering, among the places of pain. There seems a fitness in finding Him among the throngs of the sick, the halt, the blind; healing the lepers with His touch; in the chamber of the dead girl at Capernaum; with the sobbing widow at the gates of Nain; or beside the tomb of Lazarus.

But whatever depth of joy thrilled His soul when the opportunity came of binding up the broken-hearted, not less was His delight as He took His place amid the simple joys of the homes of the Galilean fishermen; or in the little home at Bethany, where by His easy and sympathetic entrance into all their interests, He became one with them in all their hopes and aspirations, their joys, their griefs.

It is no wonder, then, that in the very beginning of His ministry, we find it recorded of Him that He enlightened with His gracious presence the abodes of joy as well as those of sorrow; not only the chamber of suffering, but the wedding feast of Cana.

Before we enter upon any consideration of the details of our Lord's first miracle, it will be of profit to gather some of the broader lessons His presence there has to teach.

II. The Secret of Social Happiness

Three times in Holy Scripture it is recorded of our Lord that He wept,[2] and strange as it may seem, not a word is ever said of even one smile lighting up His face; yet no one who has caught even a little glimpse of what His earthly life was can ever think of Him as a death's-head at the feast. With what smiling interest did He watch the sim-

[2] St. Luke 19. 41; St. John 11. 35; Heb. 5. 7.

ple revelry of the younger guests; as their eyes met His, as they passed and repassed in whatever game or rout, how theirs were kindled at the loving sympathy they read in His happy, responsive glance of recognition and encouragement.

He mingled with the throng, passing from one to another, scattering smiles and sunshine everywhere, and leaving none without a word; it may have been but the conventional salutation of the day, but yet it was given with so gracious a smile that as He passed from group to group, all felt that it was good to have Him there.

The secret of the happiness that our Lord both gave and received at the feast lay in the genuineness of His sympathy. His was no conventional acceptance of the wedding invitation. It was to Him no mere social function, attendance upon which could not be refused without being ungracious. This lover of His

fellow-men was not bored by His association with them, but in every contact with them He found exercise for His kindly, loving nature.

He came with a keen living interest in all that pertained to the happiness of His people, and this interest was born of love. The spirit that is bored is the spirit that is wanting in love. Sham and mere conventionality in society are the result of the lack of love.

How different would social life be if men and women met together with a genuine, unselfish, and generous interest in each other. When one finds a man or woman who possesses this, how refreshing an oasis is it in the desert of blasé souls that make up so much of modern social life! How such an one wins the love of all by the sweet and gracious influence that flows out from him unconsciously!

III. The Day of Small Things

The miracle which we are considering shows how lovingly our Lord's interest extended itself to the little things of life about Him. The turning of the water into wine was not a great work of mercy, corporal or spiritual. It was done out of the simple kindness of a loving heart to save His friend and host from an embarrassing situation.

Some might have regarded it as more befitting the dignity of the Messiah to have reserved this first manifestation of His glory for some more important and dramatic occasion. This was not, however, the lesson He had come to teach. Life is not made up of great events, as men count great things. If we wait for great events before seizing opportunities for God's service, we shall live and die, and our part in the work of the Kingdom will not be done. Life is made up each day of a thousand little things,

each one of which affords an occasion for the service of God. Our Lord did not scorn the little opportunities, and He who would be His disciple must find nothing so small that he cannot use it for the glory of God.

Impatience with what we regard as little opportunities shows a want of understanding of the relation of the Holy Ghost to our work. It is impossible to do anything that would be worthy to be offered to God unless the Holy Spirit has part in it. He it is Who, in and through us, begins, continues, and ends it.

Whether it be a great or a small work as the world counts it, it is utterly worthless in the sight of God unless it is thus performed under the direct personal guidance of the Spirit. This is an essential part of our Christian belief. St. Paul declares that no soul can accomplish even so simple an act as acknowledging Christ to be God, "but by

the Holy Ghost"[3]; and again he warns us that the self-denial, which our Lord Himself commands, is worthless except it be "through the Spirit."[4]

If, then, the Holy Ghost is the active worker in all our labours for Christ, who will dare to say that anything is unimportant? The fact that the power of the Third Person of the Ever-Blessed Trinity is employed in a work instantly makes that work infinitely great and important. We are never to think of Him as condescending to have part in our activities, but rather are we to think of Him as taking this work, and us as His co-workers, up into the activity of the Godhead.

Let us thus regard everything that enters into our daily life, and we shall immediately realize that one who presumes to discriminate between one work of the Spirit and another, who in his pride and

[4] Rom. 8. 13. [3] 1 Cor. 12. 3.

ignorance undertakes to classify the Spirit's labours, some as important and some as unimportant, is perilously near to laying sacrilegious hands upon holy things.

Is it not worth while, then, by co-operating with the Holy Spirit, to train ourselves for the rôle of the Christ at the wedding feast; to go in and out among men, intent upon saying, not the clever, but the kindly word; to watch for the opportunity of doing promptly, and with the graciousness born of a loving heart, the little unselfish, generous act; to be uniformly thoughtful of others, considerate of their wishes, gentle and courteous in all things, reminding ourselves that each such word or act is a contribution to the building up of the Kingdom, and, however small it may seem according to worldly standards, is of infinite and eternal value according to God's standard.

IV. The Secret of Perfection

Every man of normal mind desires to do always more and more perfectly that which he undertakes. One of our natural instincts is to seek perfection. We are never quite satisfied with what we do, or with what those about us do. Even when we have the satisfaction of accomplishing more than we expected, yet after a time, as we look back on our work, we are able to see many flaws, and would welcome, if it were possible, the opportunity of revising it.

This instinct for perfection is universal in the heart of man. Although it is perverted through ignorance and sin, and often leads us into wrong paths, yet it is always operative. The very spirit of criticism, which is responsible for so much want of charity, arises from this instinct.

The work of the Christian soul is plain. There is the God-given instinct

for perfection, and whether wisely or blindly, it is ever in operation. Our part, therefore, is to give free course to this desire, and to see that the agent who guides and directs it be not our own natural spirit, but the Holy Ghost Himself.

The soul is impatient of inadequate and blundering work, yet of itself has but little power to discriminate between good and evil. Let all things be referred to God. Let the will never act without first taking the matter to Him in earnest prayer, and then do only that which conscience declares to be the will of the Spirit.

Doubt may arise, and often one has to seek spiritual counsel from those wiser than himself. But if he does the best he can, and follows faithfully what conscience indicates, as we shall see later on, God will not impute blame to him because of faulty judgment. Judgment is an intellectual, not a moral faculty, and, thank God, we shall not be held account-

able at the Judgment for our intellectual shortcomings.

All this has directly to do with the little opportunities and duties of daily life. Perfection does not consist in doing great things, but in doing ordinary things well. When St. Jerome was living at Jerusalem his friend St. Paulinus wrote him praising him for making his residence amidst the places consecrated by our Lord's earthly life. The Saint replied that it was not living in Jerusalem that counted, but living well in Jerusalem.

Nor is it only from the Saints that we can learn wholesome lessons of close and faithful application to our business in life. "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light,"[5] and from the example of sinners and worldlings we can gain much.

They set their hearts upon a certain end, and they achieve it. They choose a

[5] St. Luke 16. 8.

course and they follow it. They set out to gain popularity, to accumulate a fortune, to win political and social leadership,—all ends which in themselves are worthless,—and they succeed splendidly in grasping the empty bubble.

They succeed because they are faithful in employing the means which are afforded them. They make courageous sacrifices, and submit with cheerfulness to toil and suffering, if only by enduring these they can attain what they desire.

It is narrated in the life of St. Francis Xavier that when, after long planning and many hardships and disappointments, he was able to extend his missionary journeyings into Japan, he was ashamed and troubled to find that European merchants had penetrated that forbidden country long before him.

They had been more diligent to sail thither over dangerous and unknown seas to traffic for gold that perishes, than

he had been to deliver to the heathen the treasure of the Gospel, to preach the Faith, and to extend the kingdom and honour of his Lord. And there is no missionary country today but presents the same humiliating lesson.

"Would, O my brothers," said the great St. Bernard, preaching to his monks, "that we were as desirous of spiritual goods as men of the world are of temporal! We ought indeed to desire them more in proportion as they are the more precious. Would that we could but equal the worldling! for it is a great shame to us that they desire evil things more ardently than we do the things that are good. They run more quickly to death than we run to life."[6]

The etymological origin of our English word *progress* gives us some help in understanding one of the fundamental principles of spiritual advance. It is derived from the Latin word *progre-*

[6] St. Bernard, Serm. 36, de Divers.

dior, which means to go forward step by step. The idea of progress is not, using the word in its strict sense, to go forward by leaps and bounds. The genius of the old Latin tongue realized that this was not ordinarily the way men attained a goal. Progress was to be made step by step, little by little, only it must be persistent. God demands progress, not swift, but sure. He who lingers not on the way, but is ever moving forward, though it be by the smallest steps, will in the end attain the goal equally with him who runs the swiftest. But let it be remembered that he who walks with sure and steady step, will little by little learn also to run the way of God's commandments.

If we would set our hearts on these things, and, to use the expression, make a definite business of them, it would not be only in some far-off mystic land, haloed by the dim and holy associations of twenty centuries, that the miracles of

Christ would be wrought, but in our prosaic twentieth century streets and shops and homes would His glory be manifested forth that men might believe in Him.

V. The Miracle as a Type.

Our Lord's miracles were, almost without exception, works of mercy. St. Peter, in one of the sermons preserved for us by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, describes Him as one "Who went about doing good."[1] The works He wrought were primarily for the relief and benefit of those who were in suffering or distress.

But they were more than this. There is not a miracle recorded in the Gospels that does not present a type of some principle of His Kingdom. He heals the lepers, thus typifying the cleansing from sin. He restores sight to the blind, showing how the darkness of sin

[1] Acts 10. 38.

is to be done away. He opens the deaf ears, teaching the lesson of "hearkening what the Lord God will say."[8] He rebukes the storm and there is "a great calm"[9] recalling the promise that "He shall speak peace unto His people."[10] He raises the dead, showing forth the necessity that all men, through Him and at His word should rise from the death of sin unto eternal life.

At Cana the miracle is a type of the Holy Eucharist. As here He changed the water into wine, so in the Eucharist He changes the bread and wine into His own Body and Blood. As here, He wrought the miracle that the bride might be refreshed, so in the Eucharist He works that the Bride, His Church, might be refreshed, not with an earthly wine, even though of the best, but with the mystic wine of His Precious Blood.

This miracle offers us a striking picture of that which He was shortly to

[8] Ps. 85. 8. [9] St. Mark 4. 39. [10] Ps. 85. 8.

accomplish in His Church when He should institute the Most Holy Sacrament of His Body and Blood.

The type extends itself even to the details. When the Eternal Son, in the fulness of the times, came to earth, the race whose nature He took, was like the company at Cana; and today, as in every age, the condition of men is the same. "They have no wine." "There is a crying for wine in the streets; all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone."[11] The world may give a specious, passing pleasure, but it cannot appease the spirit's thirst, it cannot supply the "wine that maketh glad the heart of man."[12] But He, "the God of our joy and gladness,"[13] came amongst us, and by the gift of His Sacrament restored what man had lost by the Fall.

It is highly suggestive that in His great discourse on the occasion upon

[11] Isa. 24. 11. [12] Ps. 104. 15. [13] Ps. 43. 4.

which our Lord instituted the Holy Eucharist, and gave His disciples their First Communion, He spoke again and again of the restoration of that abiding spiritual joy which God had prepared for His people, but which sin had quenched.

"These things," He said, "have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you, [i. e., abide in you as a settled, permanent gift], and that your joy might be full."[14] Again, "Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy"; "Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you"; "Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."[15]

This gift of the wine of joy is nothing less than our very Lord Christ Himself, for in the Blessed Sacrament He is really and objectively present under the veils of bread and wine. As at Cana the water was changed into a real

[14] St. John 15. 11. [15] St. John 16. 20, 22, 24.

and genuine wine, the best indeed that had been served at the feast, so in the Eucharist the elements of bread and wine are changed into the true and genuine Body and Blood of Christ. The angels and saints as they bow down in aweful adoration before His Divine Majesty in the heaven of heavens, possess His Presence not more truly or immediately than do we as we kneel before His Sacramental Majesty, enthroned on the lowliest of earthly altars.

Further, the type extends itself to the method by which these mysteries are accomplished. It was the power of God that wrought, but it was done at the hands of the servants, who gave ready obedience to His command. So in consecrating bread and wine to be His Body and Blood, it is the power of God that works, but at the hands of the priesthood of His Church. The priest fills the chalice, and proceeds in obedience to His command, "This do in re-

membrance of Me"[16]; and in this act of obedience the wine is changed into His Blood which is "drink indeed."[17]

It is not without significance that the first miracle our Lord wrought typified that which was to be the great *positive* work of His Holy Spirit in the Church on earth, namely, the strengthening and sanctification of faithful souls through the receiving of the Glorified Lord Himself in Holy Communion.

The miracles of healing were types of the negative aspect of His work, of the cleansing of the soul from sin, of the undoing the work of Satan in those who had yielded themselves to his will. This cleansing is necessary before God can indwell the soul. It is the great preparatory act, and before it is completed the soul cannot be in union with God, it cannot receive His grace, it can do nothing pleasing to Him, save only to repent.

[16] St. Luke 22. 19. [17] St. John 6. 55.

But the great ultimate purpose God has regarding His people has nothing negative in it. He became incarnate, He suffered and died, He rose again from the dead, He ascended into Heaven, and sent His Holy Spirit to indwell the Church, to take away our sins, indeed; but this was only in order to make ready the way for the great eternal work of leading the soul on in His knowledge, His love, and His likeness. It is through the power of the Sacrament that God in this life leads us along this way of illumination and unity.

One of the objections advanced by unbelievers to this miracle is that the quantity of wine produced was far in excess of any reasonable requirement. Such objectors, however, forget one of the fundamental principles of God's work for the salvation of His people, of which this very circumstance offers a definite type. In seeking to redeem

and sanctify, He does not measure out His power and mercy with stinting hand. The slightest impulse of His power would be sufficient to accomplish all things, but such is His love that upon every individual whom He would save, He pours out all the infinitude of His omnipotence and of His mercy.

Nowhere does this principle find stronger illustration than in the Passion of our Lord. One drop of His Precious Blood, a single pang of His suffering, was of such infinite merit that it could have redeemed a thousand worlds. But He was not content with this. He chose to pour out His life to the uttermost, and that, not in any one form of suffering, but amid contempt and contumely, in Agony and Bloody Sweat, in blows and smitings, in scourgings and crowning with thorns, in nakedness and shameful exposure, in death as of a criminal whose existence outraged society could no longer tolerate.

Of all this, the superabundant generosity of the miracle of Cana was a type and prophecy, and the fulfillment is found in a special degree in the Blessed Sacrament. In this Mystery He might have bestowed upon us an ineffable gift, and yet something quite apart from Himself, whereby we might, had He so willed it, become wholly sanctified. But the everlasting love with which He loved us could be satisfied with nothing short of giving us the infinite gift of Himself.

CHAPTER II

WE have no knowledge of the identity of the household at Cana, but there seems scarcely room for doubt that it was closely allied to the Holy Family at Nazareth by ties either of blood or friendship. Cana was but a short distance from Nazareth, and St. John tells us that the mother of Jesus was at the feast. She occupied apparently some position of authority, as that of a friend or relative who might come in to relieve the family of certain details in the entertainment of the guests. It is she who knows, as a mere guest would not, the embarrassing fact that the wine had failed; she undertakes to secure our Lord's help in supplying the want; she speaks with authority to the servants, who obey her without question.

We have thought of our Lord and the spirit in which He came to the wedding.

Let us think of His Blessed Mother and her spirit as she mingled among the guests, brightening the feast with her sweet ministrations.

I. The Spirit of Intercession

The first lesson we are to learn from her at Cana is that of a spirit of loving intercession. She had learned to regard with a practical, charitable interest those who were about her; and their need, though but temporal and passing, roused in her the loving desire to do what she could to help.

There was, however, another lesson that accompanied this. She had learned that in everything, however small its seeming importance, there was but one true source of help. This was our Lord Himself. She might, when she perceived the want, have used some merely natural means to supply it. A servant might have been despatched to buy the

wine, or a neighbour importuned to lend of his store to meet the necessity. This was just what she did not do. She went to Jesus.

Have we learned the spirit of intercession? When we find those about us in distress, do our hearts instinctively turn to God in prayer for them? Perhaps we have the material means and opportunity of helping them, and if God has entrusted these to us, He surely means us to use them; but a better thing than this is to go to God with the troubles of those whom we would aid.

This want of a spirit of intercession is responsible in a large measure for the paucity and thinness of the prayers of many Christians. How quickly do we pray our poor prayers away! A few minutes on our knees, and we are at a loss what more to say to God. Yet the teeming ranks of men about us are living lives full of sorrow, borne down with burdens that our prayers could relieve.

Let us resolve to give five minutes each day to recalling the known needs, spiritual and temporal, of those of our own families, of the friends with whom we are constantly associated, the neighbours whose little circle of life overlies ours, the parish, its clergy, and those with whom we worship on the Lord's Day; the wider life of the Church as we know it, its need of men for its ministry, the missionary cry of those in far-off lands or in our own, which comes to us again and again; the griefs, the passions, the wrongs, the sins, of the great world, as we find the record of them in the daily newspaper;—let us consider all these for a little space. Let us write down on a slip of paper the definite subjects that occur to us in this five minutes, and see if there will not be material enough to afford hours of prayer, of wrestling with God for the sorrows of the world and the needs of His people.

We are also reminded that without this spirit of intercession no prayer can be acceptable to God. The only prayer our Lord gives us, commanding us to use it, contains not one petition that does not involve prayer for others. He teaches no man to ask for his daily bread, or even for the forgiveness of his sins, without at the same time pleading for others. "Give us," not me, "this day our daily bread"; "Forgive us," not me, "our trespasses." So all through the Lord's Prayer, whether we ask for blessings temporal or spiritual, we gather up in our prayer the needs of our brethren, and we present them along with our own to Him Who has taught us thus to pray.

But the Lord's Prayer teaches us a still wider lesson. No one can examine the spirit of it without realizing that it condemns selfishness in intercession. To some the expression *selfishness in intercession* may seem a contradiction in

terms. The fundamental thought that the word suggests is doing something for others. How then can it be selfish? Easily; and we have only to examine our prayers to see how we fail at this point.

Consider the subjects of your intercessions, and see how many of them have to do with your own pleasure and interests. To illustrate: You receive word that a dear friend is at the point of death. How swiftly do you fly to God for succour! How passionately do you plead with Him for the life of the one you love!

But suppose the sick man is not your friend, but a stranger of whom you never before heard, for whom some one asks you to pray. How different is the tone and earnestness of your petition! In the former case, the recovery of your friend was something that affected your own interests most intimately. In the latter, you were not personally involved.

The intercession concerned only the glory of God and the good of others. No selfish element could enter in; and your prayer was languid, it was soon forgotten.

This does not mean that God requires us to take the same lively personal interest in the one case as in the other. That were quite impossible; and, moreover, charity begins at home, and we are more especially bound to pray for those whom God has placed near to us by earthly association. In a real sense, God commits them to us, and we have a duty to them that we have to no others. Nor is it at all possible for us to have the same depth of feeling about the needs of a stranger as about the needs of a loved one.

It is easy to see, then, that it is just here that the real effort in intercession is required. It is easy to pray for those we love; hard, indeed, not to pray for them. But it demands a heart with a

world-wide sympathy to pray for those remote from us, and, in the absence of personal interest to stimulate us, it cannot be done without hard work and a steady application of the will.

II. "Nothing Wavering"

The question for God's people is not only, What to pray? but also, How to pray? The substance of our prayers may be good, but with what spirit do we make our approach to God? Learn the spirit of the Blessed Mother, and like princes we shall have power with God.

She approaches our Lord in a spirit of confidence. *"They have no wine,"* she announces to Him. Four simple words, and yet there is in this short sentence a world of suggestion. The question arises inevitably, Why should she thus have gone to Him? Was there something in His past life, some strange power that perhaps even in boyhood He

exercised, that gave her an assurance that now in this time of embarrassment and distress He would do something to help?

Whatever answer we may find to this question, one thing is sure, namely, that the Blessed Mother had a strong psychic sense that something would be done. There was an inner conviction that overrode the seeming rebuff she received in His reply, and which led her to give her instructions to the servants with a complete certainty that her reference of the difficulty to Him would not be in vain. How it would be worked out she knew not; nor did she concern herself about this, for it was none of her affair. Her business was to pray. His was all the rest.

Do we carry this same strong sense of certainty into our prayers? When we pray, do we, regardless of God's often seeming unconsciousness of our prayers, act as though there could be no

sort of question concerning the issue? How often is it that God's goodness shames us for our want of faith. We pray for some little boon, and when God gives it promptly we realize it with a start of surprise, as though it were a strange thing that He should fulfill His promises to give whatsoever we ask in His Son's name.

There is but one thing that can stand between us and the fulfilment of every prayer, that is, its being withheld because His more perfect knowledge sees that it will not be good for us. It may be good in itself, but not for us; it may be good for us in the abstract, but because of our unworthiness, the gift at this time might be an injury rather than a blessing.

We are not always able to discern these conditions, but this should not deter us from praying for anything whatsoever (barring, of course, that which we know to be of the nature of sin), if

only we can add, what our Lord added in the hour of His intensest prayer: "Not my will, but Thine be done."[1]

If this is our spirit in prayer, then the slightest word that we address to Him has power to liberate the omnipotence of God, that it may work according to our wills, since our wills have become one with His will.

III. The Ideal Prayer

Short, terse, and to the point,—such are the characteristics of the prayer our Lord's Mother addresses to Him: "They have no wine." She has no plan in her mind, anticipating what He might do. She makes no suggestion of ways and means. She states the difficulty in the fewest possible words, and leaves it all with Him. In this the Blessed Mother prays the ideal prayer. She knows His goodness; perhaps she

[1] St. Luke, 22. 42.

knows something of His divine power, and she leaves the case with Him, sure that He will give the answer in His own time, in His own way.

Intimate as her knowledge of Him was, however, it was not greater or more certain than that which we have of Him today. She had details of experience in her life that we can never know, but no experience can present the fact of His sympathy and His longing to help His people more definitely than it has been presented to us by the Church and the Scriptures. We know His power; we know His love; we know His will to help us; most blessed of all, we know His promise that cannot fail.

We realize some need, and we go to God asking Him to supply it; but so often we have our own notion of how God must work. We lay out a line of action for Him, and many times we fail to see the divine readiness, yea, more, eagerness, to answer our prayer, be-

cause we are unable to conceive of His doing anything save according to the plan that we have deemed is the best. "Behold, I thought he will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place and recover the leper."[2] How nearly did Naaman miss the great boon he had come so far to seek, just because he had prearranged a method of action for God's prophet; and who knows how many of our most earnest prayers go unanswered because we insist upon God working in our, rather than in His own, way?

[2] 2 Kings 5. 11.

CHAPTER III

I. Mother and Son

IT IS scarcely to be doubted that the Blessed Mother long before this time had some knowledge of her divine Son's mission. As through the thirty years of the Hidden Life she pondered in her heart the beautiful mysteries of His life which were unfolded before her, there must have come to her a clear consciousness of how His ministry was to work out the salvation of His people. Nor is it probable that our Lord would have left her altogether in doubt as to His purpose, as the time drew near for His entrance upon the work His Father had sent Him to do.

We can think of Him, perhaps as they were leaving the little home at Nazareth to go down to Jordan, telling her what her mother-heart must have divined

long before, that He would no more return to that quiet life; that henceforth He would not have where to lay His head; that He would no longer labour for His daily bread in the carpenter shop, but that His meat, that which was to sustain and keep Him, would be to do in His appointed ministry the will of Him that sent Him, and to finish His work.

It was a crushing sorrow for her to know that the sweet old life was done; and yet amid the blinding mist of tears that human weakness could not restrain, her heart beat high as she thought of Him going forth to do the work that Israel and all the world had longed for and waited for since that terrible day when at the gate of Eden, the Father's loving heart could not brook to utter the primeval curse without, in the same breath, giving the promise of a Redeemer who should bruise the serpent's head.[1]

[1] Gen. 3. 15.

As beneath the influence of the Baptist's preaching she meditated upon these things, they became clear; and then with the opening heavens, the descending Dove, and the Father's voice, she received the final assurance of her hope that she was indeed the Mother of the Messiah.

And now the time has come that He should manifest His glory. With a holy impatience she seizes upon this opportunity to hasten that manifestation which she knows is so near at hand. There is need of wine, and with a heart quivering with a sure expectation, she comes straight to Him. No greater occasion is needed, for He by a word can magnify the most obscure circumstance that it should stand out as a central point in all the world's history.

"*They have no wine.*" Then she awaits His word, that by which He is to perform the marvel which is to declare Him here among His own people,

in the house of His own kinsfolk, to be the Holy One of Israel. His answer comes, but how different from what she had expected! *"Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come."*

II. God's Times and Seasons

It will clear the field for our consideration of this subject and give us a safe and reverent boldness, if we lay down in the beginning, for our own protection, the truth that the Blessed Mother of our Lord was without sin. She was "our tainted nature's solitary boast,"

> "Whose virgin bosom was uncrost
> With the least shade of thought to sin allied."[1]

The subject of the sinlessness of Blessed Mary was not one that occupied the mind of the primitive Church to any extent. But very early there arose the belief that she was never involved in

[1] Wordsworth, *The Virgin.*

actual sin, and only a few authorities can be found in any age of the Church who attribute sin to her. St. Augustine declared that all have sinned "except the Holy Virgin Mary, concerning whom," he says, "for the honour of our Lord, I wish no question at all to be raised when we are treating of sins"; and St. Ambrose describes the Blessed Mother as "entirely free from every stain of sin."[3]

That she was sinless did not, however, mean that she had arrived at perfection of human judgment; nor that she did not require a certain discipline of character. The fact that she had yet to suffer above the sufferings of all women, shows that she had not yet learned that perfection which can come only through suffering.

[3] Those who wish to pursue this subject further will do well to read the first chapter of Canon Wirgman's *The Blessed Virgin and All the Company of Heaven*, where will be found the dicta of the Fathers and Anglican authorities.

Nor had the Blessed Mother been so confirmed in her sinlessness as to make it impossible for her to fall. The chief glory of her life, as our Lord Himself tells us, was that though it was possible for her to sin, yet through correspondence with His grace, she kept herself unspotted from the world. When she was praised for her blessedness as His Mother, our Lord interrupted to speak rather of her blessedness because she had heard the word of God and kept it.[4]

It was her holy impatience, her passionate longing, as yet undisciplined, for the coming of the Kingdom, that needed to be chastened. Our Lord in thus dealing with His Mother teaches us the lesson that "it is not for us to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His power."[5] We have a zeal for God's service, but too often we are impatient of delay. We want to see the glory of God in our own

[4] St. Luke 11. 27-28. [5] Acts 1. 7.

time and way, not in the time and manner He has decreed. There is nothing perhaps that is so great a peril as this in our day of excessive Church activity. Dr. Pusey says somewhere in one of his incomparable Sermons: "Many a man is led into mortal sin by an over-eagerness to do something for God."

There is a modern speculation concerning the crime of Judas, with which one cannot agree, but which, for the sake of the principle it teaches, is worth perhaps more than a passing thought. It is that the traitor's real purpose was to precipitate the coming of the Kingdom; that, impatient of our Lord's unworldly method, he planned to force Him to disclose Himself, and to take His power and reign.

Whether or not this was Judas' purpose, it has been the purpose since his time, of many a soul who, full of untempered zeal for the Lord, has betrayed Him through an over-eagerness, an un-

disciplined desire to break through God's plan, and to force the immediate triumph of truth over falsehood.

III. The Right Way

This temptation came frequently to our Blessed Lord in the days of His ministry. "Go into Judea that Thy disciples also may see the works that Thou doest"; "Shew Thyself to the world."[s] Even at the first Eucharist, having just received his First Communion, humble Jude asked the like question: "Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?"[t]

We are not to be surprised at this, for but a few days before the feast at Cana, Satan had brought the same temptation to our Lord Himself. "The devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and

[s] St. John 7. 3-4. [t] St. John 14. 22.

saith unto him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me."[8]

Here was the opportunity in a moment of time to make the kingdoms of the world "the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ."[9] And more than this, to win the souls He loved so much. When we think of the great love with which He loved us, we can understand in some degree what the temptation was. He could look across the centuries that were to come, and see the millions who would never hear the message of His love; and the millions who, hearing it, would reject it. Here was the opportunity to win them all. The Adversary, in payment for some small concession, we know not what, was ready to yield up every soul to Him, and no one should ever again pluck them out of His Hand.

But none of these things moved Him. It was not the Father's way, and He

[8] St. Matt. 4. 8-9. [9] Rev. 11. 15.

had come not primarily to save the world, but to do the will of Him that sent Him, whatever that will should be. Here was offered a short and easy way; but the Father's way was that of the Cross and Passion; it lay through the gate of death; and that way, and no other, would He tread.

Had He yielded to the temptation, the world might have been saved, so far as its mere withdrawal from the power of Satan was concerned, but such a method of salvation would have been on terms of Satan's dictation rather than through the working out of the divine will.

Through all the course of revelation, this is seen to be one of God's chosen ways of proving man. It was His method when in the journey of His people from Egypt to Canaan He set forth the type of the progress of the soul from the bondage of sin to the heavenly Jerusalem. Israel might in a few days have made the journey from Egypt into the

Promised Land by the familiar caravan track that had brought their fathers into Egypt in the days of Joseph.

But God would not have it so. "They went astray in the wilderness, and found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty their soul fainted in them. . . . But he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to the city where they dwelt." [10] God's "ways are past finding out," [11] but it is always the right way, and though some path of our own choosing may seem at the time to be better, yet His way, and that only, will lead us aright.

IV. The Mother's Honour

Let us consider our Lord's reply to His Mother. Those misguided souls whose infatuated perversity leads them to think that the Son is to be honoured in the dishonour of the Mother, tell us that in His address to her,—"Woman,"

[10] Ps. 107. 4-7 [11] Rom. 11. 33.

—there is to be found a stern reproof, which, they say, argues sin in her. To dispose of this interpretation one has only to refer to the fact that in the hour of His tenderest regard for her, from the Cross on Calvary, He gave her the same address when He said, "Woman, behold thy son." [12]

However it may sound in our English translation, neither in the Aramaic which our Lord spoke, nor in the Greek in which the Gospel is written, does the expression bear any other than a kindly, yea, more, a reverent and dignified significance. Bishop Westcott says in his commentary on this passage: "In the original there is not the least tinge of reproof or severity in the term. The address is that of courteous respect, even of tenderness." [13]

Our Lord's expression to His Mother has been so widely misunderstood, as well as misrepresented, however, that it

[12] St. John 19. 26. [13] Westcott, *in loc.*

is well to examine His use of the word at other times, to see what significance He seems to have attached to it.

In addition to the present instance, six occasions are recorded where He used this form of address. In St. Matthew 15. 28, He says to the woman of Canaan, in an exclamation of admiration and commendation: "O woman, great is thy faith!" In St. Luke 13. 12, in kindness and favour He lays His hands upon the woman "which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years," and healing her, says: "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." To His first Samaritan convert, who also was the first to declare Him and His truth to her fellow-countrymen, He uses the same address while leading her gently on to an appreciation of His revelation (St. John 4. 21). His tender words of absolution,—"Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more,"—spoken to the sinner (St. John 8. 10), began with the same ad-

dress, "Woman." His address to His Mother on Calvary has already been mentioned. His final use of the word is found in St. John 20. 15, when, in one of the tenderest episodes of His earthly life, He addresses St. Mary Magdalene in the garden on Easter morning: "Woman, why weepest thou?"

Further than this, the use of the word in Greek literature generally, disposes of any idea that it is employed in rebuke or reprobation. On the contrary, the best Greek scholars tells us that in the form of direct address it is "often used as a term of respect or affection." [14]

V. The Mother's Lesson

"What have I to do with thee?" This expression is not easy of translation, and the rendering in our Authorized Version is an unfortunate one. It was a very common form among the Jews, and is found repeatedly in the Old Tes-

[14] See γυνή in Liddell & Scott, *Greek Lexicon.*

tament. Literally translated, our Lord's words are: "What is there to me and thee?" and was simply the Hebrew idiom ordinarily employed for saying: "What is there that you and I have in common in regard to this matter?"

It was His declaration that His life of subjection was over; that the divine ministry whose work and authority could be shared by no one, was about to begin. There may have been, subconsciously or unconsciously in the Mother's mind, the thought of commanding Him in this exercise of divine power, somewhat as she had been wont to do in the dear old Nazareth days when He had in all things submitted to her in sweet subjection.

In reply He reminds her that His time and work can no longer be at her disposal. The Divine ministry has begun, and He can no longer look to her, as for thirty years He had done, to interpret for Him His Father's will. He

now is to be the judge, under the direction of the divine Spirit that indwelt Him, of times and seasons, and will know for Himself when the hour strikes for the manifestation of His glory.

And yet, although reminding her in gentle but unmistakable language that He can no longer be subject to her, let it not be forgotten that Christ works His first miracle, He publicly manifests forth His glory for the first time, at the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In His first miracle He honours His Holy Mother. It was her word, and above all, her faith, that called forth the first exercise of His divine power. No longer was she to command Him as His earthly mother, but her faith in Him as her God and Saviour had power to call forth this operation of His divine energy.

Nor have her faith and intercession lost their ancient power, and He Who

on earth hearkened to His Mother's prayer, does not now in glory turn a deaf ear to her pleading for sinners. Therefore the pious instinct of the Church bids us come to her with the cry: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death."

"How can she hear us? How does she know of our application to her?" asks some timid, doubting soul. We know not how, but we are not of those who make the compass of our little intellect the measure of God's truth, and reject all that we cannot understand. They cannot go astray who follow the Church's practice of eighteen hundred years,[15] and the Lord Who caused Abraham to hear the ineffectual pleading of lost Dives from the depth of hell,[16] reveals in ways we reck not of to His chosen Saints the cry of His faithful

[15] See Darwell Stone, *The Invocation of Saints*, 3rd Edition. pp. 8-9. [16] St. Luke 16.

people for the protection of their fervent, effectual prayers.

In His response to the Blessed Mother there is the same tender spirit of reproach that marked our Lord's first recorded utterance: "How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"[17] At Cana He seems to wonder that she should seek to influence the exercise of His divine power, when but so lately she had learned, from His own lips doubtless, that the old days were past forever, and that the hitherto hidden omnipotence of His Godhead was now to make itself manifest.

Just so had the Boy in the Temple marvelled at her. "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" The term St. Luke here uses to express our Lord's meaning is significant. The word which we translate "wist," does not mean merely to possess knowledge of a fact, but to have perceived it by the

[17] St. Luke 2. 49.

use of one's reason and senses; to have worked out this knowledge for oneself through experience and observation. He seemed to say, with His thought directed toward her and St. Joseph and the great opportunities they had enjoyed: "Wist ye not, ye of all others, that I must be about My Father's business? These men in the temple might wonder at me, but surely not you, after all that has been revealed to you; after all the things ye have pondered."

So likewise at Cana; and we find in the silence of the Mother on both occasions the proof of how swiftly she perceived and accepted the lesson her divine Son would teach her. She makes no parleying, no further reply is given Him. Heart answers to heart, and He knows that the lesson He has sought to teach has been received with a humility that has made her spirit again to rejoice in God her Saviour. He knows that it marks for her a new advance in

the perfect life toward which she has ever tended, and for which her soul has laboured.

Our own lesson will not be far to seek. Let us, each one in the silence of his own heart, strive, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to gain the knowledge of just where it applies to us. Wherein do I deserve correction? And when it comes, am I quick to recognize it as an expression of love on the part of One Who has loved me with an everlasting love,[18] and Who, with a yearning that broke His heart on Calvary, longs to make me perfect even as He is perfect?[19]

[18] Jer. 31. 3. [19] St. Matt. 5. 48.

CHAPTER IV

I. The Nurturing of Humility

IT IS significant that the first two utterances of our Lord to His Mother seem to be of the nature of discipline. "How is it that ye sought Me?" He asked, when after three days of heart-breaking loss she found Him in the temple; and on the present occasion after hearing her ideal prayer, He replies, "*Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.*"

Lest we form some rash opinion of these occasions, let us inquire somewhat of the principle on which God acts when He sends humiliation to His people. The question turns on whether humiliations are marks of divine favour or disfavour.

It is the uniform teaching of Holy Scripture, that the one fundamental

[1] St. Luke 2. 49.

virtue which must be the basis of all other Christian virtues is humility. When our Lord would give us the chief reason why we should learn of Him, He says it is because "I am meek and lowly in heart."[2]

Reason also shows us, even were it not the teaching of all the masters of the spiritual life, that, as St. Bernard says, "Humiliation is the path to humility as patience is to peace, as reading is to knowledge." Those therefore who would seek to flee all humiliations cannot hope to grow in this most necessary virtue; and, *per contra,* to those whom God would exalt, He, out of His loving purpose for them, must send frequent and perhaps very deep humiliations. "Humble yourselves, therefore," says St. Peter, not when humiliation comes in a passing or seemingly accidental way, but, "*under the mighty hand of*

[2] St. Matt. 11. 29.

God, that He may exalt you in due time."[8]

If rebuke and humiliation were intended here at Cana, it was that her divine Son, seeing the perfect response she was making to the work of the Holy Ghost in her heart, with loving eagerness sought to give her opportunity to humble herself still further under His mighty hand that He might exalt her to still loftier heights of holiness.

We cannot doubt that with the insight that her perfect obedience had given her into the ways of God, she understood His purpose, and rejoiced in the opportunity to become more like Him Who was her Son and her Saviour.

The world regards humiliation as the one thing above all others to be avoided, but the Christian who takes this view is by his avoidance of such occasions deliberately repulsing the loving advance of the Holy Spirit, and rejecting the

[8] 1 St. Peter 5. 6.

proffered means of attaining to a higher place in the Kingdom of Heaven. He is showing himself ignorant of the first principle of God's method of training the souls upon whom He has set His love, for He warns us, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten."[4]

When we come to be taught of God, we enroll ourselves in a school in whose curriculum the science of humility holds the first place. What would be thought of a man who, entering a medical school, systematically planned to escape every opportunity offered him of learning the art of healing? And would he not be regarded as quite mad if he should resent as a strange and inexplicable unkindness the action of a teacher who persistently thrust upon him the occasions of learning?

And yet this is what almost every Christian, in some degree, does. We express our allegiance to God; we make

[4] Rev. 3. 19.

constant profession of a desire to perfect ourselves in Him; we familiarize ourselves with the terms and requirements of His service; and when He takes us at our word, and proceeds to apply to us the ordinary principles of His divine instruction, we turn and twist, and seek by every means in our power to avoid the lesson He sets for us.

More than this, if He in His faithfulness to His trust, keeps His promise, and will not let us escape, but lays upon us the painful, humbling cross, by which alone we can secure the divine knowledge and training we profess to seek, we cry out against Him, and in surprise or even anger, wonder how a God of love can deal thus with those who seek His service and His perfection.

Alas, how different are we from the Saints whom the Church delights to honour! They became Saints, not because they were naturally averse to sin, or because they were sheltered from

temptation; but just because they made a definite business of accepting and welcoming every opportunity for the practice of humility. They worked at it as a man would work at a trade. They were as alert to seize every such occasion as the scholar is to deepen his learning, as the merchant to increase his gains.

More zealous still, they did not wait for such opportunities to arise, but resolutely sought them out and gave all their attention to devising and improving means for humility, catching eagerly at everything that promised to make them more like our Lord who is "meek and lowly in heart." [5] And God, seeing their zeal and courage, did not permit them to be disappointed of their hope, but in His great love sent them tribulations manifold that they might the more swiftly and surely reach the goal of their desire. Thus did our Lord deal with His holy Mother; thus has He dealt with the Saints in every age.

[5] St. Matt. 11. 29.

But we are not Saints. We are yet sinners, weak and erring, with little love and less courage. It would perhaps be a dangerous presumption in us to seek out occasions for humiliation which God has not already provided. But one thing we can do. We can resolve never to avoid the occasions that He sends, and to pray very earnestly that we may become worthy of greater and higher lessons in the school of humility. If we can be faithful in this, it may be that the day will come when He will inflame our hearts with more burning desire for conformity to Him, and give us the strength to run with swift and unfaltering feet the way of His perfection.

II. Love's Discipline

He would have a low idea indeed of God's love who expected devotion to His cause to bring the satisfaction that the natural heart longs for. When our Lady prayed this ideal prayer, it may have

seemed to her to have been the moment our Lord would choose for a public commendation of her virtues. On the contrary, He offers what might appear to be a rebuff.

And He Who would give us a share in her exaltation, deals with us in like manner. Therefore when trial, disappointment, or humiliation comes, let us recognize it, not as something that happens as a mere natural consequence of the truth that "man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward";[6] but as coming directly from the hand of a loving God, Who, for our own good, sends us His holy discipline.

The Saints had no difficulty in understanding this. Again and again it is recorded as the experience of the inspired psalmist. "Before I was troubled, I went wrong, but now have I kept Thy word"; "It is good for me that I have been in trouble, that I may learn Thy statutes"; "I know, O Lord, that

[6] Job 5. 7.

Thy judgments are right, and that Thou of very faithfulness has caused me to be troubled."[7]

This last saying of the psalmist is one of those bold addresses to God from which the Saints did not shrink; and in it he implies that God, had He spared him, would have failed in carrying out faithfully the covenant and promise He had made to afford him occasion and opportunity to grow in holiness.

Franciscan historians tell us that in the early days of the Order, when St. Francis and his brothers were the sport and ridicule of the rabble in the streets, Blessed Giles was raised to an ecstacy of grateful love by the contempt they met; and that when scorn was no longer visited upon them, his soul grew restless as he contemplated the spiritual loss they were suffering in no longer being counted worthy to endure persecution for Christ.

[7] Ps. 119. 67, 71, 75.

Our Lord has indeed promised His followers the gift of a "joy that no man taketh from you," [8] but it is not the joy of the world. It is no uncommon experience for a soul to begin Lent, or some other of the Church's seasons, with strong and pious resolutions such as we think ought to bring a very real sense of peace and joy. Yet how often are these hopes dashed. God seems to rebuff us. So far from enjoying a sense of inward calm, there settles down upon us a spiritual desolation. Prayer had never seemed so hard. The hour for our meditation strikes, and it seems but the signal for a thousand distractions.

God is administering to us the discipline of love, and what He means to teach us is that special seasons are not for our pleasure, but for the strengthening of our interior character.

How often is this forgotten in the Church's seasons of special devotion.

[8] St. John 16. 22.

Folk who assume to be pious, and who affect spiritual things, run hither and thither as the season approaches, preparing themselves for what they regard as a time of spiritual refreshment, but for what is in so many instances nothing short of a round of religious dissipation. They are as anxious to know what the "attractions" are in this or that church, as at other times of the year they are to know what is offered at the theatre. Who is going to give such and such a retreat? Who will preach the Passion on Good Friday here or there?

Do we realize at such times the tremendous responsibility involved in such seasons in centres of large Church activity, and that at the Judgment we shall have to give an account of the use we have made of every retreat, every course of spiritual instruction, even of every sermon we hear?

The test of what all these are worth to us is not to be found in the pleasure

we derive from them. The degree of patience with which we meet some disappointment is a better test. Sickness, it may be, comes before Lent is half over. All our plans are shattered. Instead of edifying ourselves with certain spiritual exercises to which we had looked forward with so much eagerness, we must remain at home. At such times, is patience strong? Do we remind ourselves that God never lets us lack for any grace when the absence of the ordinary means of gaining it is not the result of our fault?

Or when God allows us to go on, revelling in a wealth of spiritual opportunity, what is the condition when the excitement of the season is past? There may have been many rebuffs; much spiritual dryness may have afflicted our souls; and despite the longing of our hearts, God's face may seem to have been turned from us. But if after all is done we are quieter and more loving in our

thoughts; if in our tongues there is a higher law of kindness, if our actions show more of the Christlike temper, then this season has been to us what Cana was to the Blessed Virgin, a time of deepening our spiritual tone, of renewing and strengthening the life of God within.

The repining of Christian souls at suffering and humiliation is one of the elements in human life that the angels must find it very hard to understand. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." This statement finds place twice in Holy Scripture.[9] It is the universal teaching of the Holy Ghost, and is elaborated by all the masters of the spiritual life; and yet it is hard for us to grasp God's meaning in it.

We think the Cross a sign of divine disfavour, forgetting that the Cross was primarily prepared for One in whom

[9] Prov. 3. 12; Heb. 12. 6.

the Father was perfectly well pleased; and that it has been promised to us as the pledge of our union with Him. He was made perfect through suffering, and we cannot hope for perfection by any other means. The very pang and pressure of it is the proof that God's power is operating within us to make us perfect. The best things of life are not the pleasant things.

> "Things that hurt and things that mar
> Shape the man for perfect praise;
> Shock and strain and ruin are
> Friendlier than the smiling days."

III. Seeking Not Her Own

Having seen what the interior attitude of the Blessed Mother was, it would be quite impossible to think of her falling into the little meshes of pride that so often ensnare us. For example, we cannot conceive of her seeking to justify herself; but which of us, had we been in her place, would not have been

tempted,—indeed, which of us would not have yielded,—to thought or word of self-justification? We had done just the right thing, we had responded with swift and loving readiness to the leading of the Spirit, and then to be rebuked!

If this thought arises, be sure that it comes direct from Satan. This is the kind of occasion upon which he presents his cleverest arguments. "If you are wrongly accused, or misunderstood, in the presence of others, your love of justice and truth should compel you to declare the real facts." So he speaks; but let us lay bare the fallacy of his argument. When we are falsely praised, does he seek to incite us to a similar alertness to disclaim what is attributed to us?

The fact is we love the praises of men. The Blessed Mother loved the praise of God, and her conscience assuring her that despite the seeming rebuke, she

was pleasing to Him, she asked no more. She was content.

It is narrated in the life of St. Vincent de Paul that on one occasion, being falsely accused, he took no care, beyond a calm denial, to prove his innocence. His friends remonstrated with him that he was standing in the way of justice to allow so false an imputation to rest upon him. "Many have been the sins for which I have suffered nothing," he replied. "If it is justice you wish me to have, let me bear this as punishment for the real sins I have so many times committed against God."

A good God offers the sinning soul mercy and pardon, and woe betide the one who spurns this offer, and proudly demands justice at the bar of heaven.

CHAPTER V

I. "Whatsoever He Saith Unto You"

JESUS had not yet manifested forth His glory in His wonderful works, but the power that dwelt within Him had already made itself felt wherever men looked into His face. The disciples who had followed Him from Jordan had declared abroad the story of His Baptism, of the descending Dove, of the Voice that spake from heaven, and the testimony that the Baptist had borne concerning Him. Rumour had been busy with His name, and already, no doubt, the servants had marked Him among the guests.

Then follows the failure of the wine. They wait in eager silence as the Blessed Mother makes her appeal to Him, but how disappointing is the answer! What more can the Mother say? But she does not desire to say more to Him. She has

made her petition with a heart full of perfect confidence, and she has by her own obedience learned the mind of Christ too well to doubt.

Serene, with faith unshaken, she turns to the expectant servants: *"Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."*

"Whatsoever"; it matters not what it is. Perhaps today you will find strange things to ponder in your heart as I have done these long years past; things that may pass human understanding; but, however that may be, *"Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."*

II. The Nature of Obedience

The first word of the Blessed Mother's command lays down for the servants the same principle it lays down for us, namely, that there is no limit to the obedience that is to be rendered to God.

Let us consider the nature of the service He requires. It must be a free-will offering. There is no compulsion about

the service of the Kingdom of Heaven. God does not force men into His employ. His Kingdom is one of free men, not of slaves; and since enlistment in His service is our own free act, we must recognize the greater responsibility that lies upon us to pay that which we have vowed.

God has made man in His own image, and He reverences His image wherever He finds it. Our freedom of will is one of the richest and most significant endowments He has given man, making us like Himself in the perfect freedom of His own divine will. "My soul is alway in my hand."[1] I am free to cherish it as a precious thing, or to cast it vilely away. He will not crush that in me which is part of His own divine likeness.

If, however, we determine to live our lives for Him, in order to gain acceptance, the service we offer must be a full and generous one. He who has enrolled

[1] Ps. 119. 109.

himself as a soldier of Christ, and then seeks to pick and choose, according to his own shifting will, the things wherein he will serve, is sinning the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, "keeping back part of the price." [2]

This is one of the burning issues in the Christian world today, divided as it is into hundreds of forms of so-called Christianity. There is a false charity abroad which talks of every man serving God his own way. The man, however, who deliberately serves God his own way, is one who is violating the terms of his enlistment, and cannot hope for acceptance.

There is not the least reason for thinking that Nadab and Abihu were less zealous for the service of God in the abstract than were Moses and Aaron; but they chose to serve Him in some other way than that which He had decreed, "and there went out fire from the Lord and devoured them." [3]

[2] Acts 5. 3. [3] Lev. 10. 1-2.

There is neither love nor kindness in condoning the errors of those who, however earnest they may be, are giving a supposed service to God outside the pale of the visible communion of the one Church which our Lord founded. How God's uncovenanted mercies may operate in such cases, we know not, save that the Catholic Church has always taught that no soul will suffer except for its own *wilful* rejection of what it knew to be the truth. But the Church also teaches that those to whom the oracles are committed, will be held to a terble responsibility if they fail to "expound unto them the way of God more perfectly."[1]

Consider the folly of a half-hearted obedience to God. The service of unlimited and unconditioned obedience is not easy to the natural man, and if not lightened and relieved by love, nothing is more intolerable. A half-hearted service means indeed forfeiting the

[1] Acts 18. 26.

pleasures of the world, which, base though they may be, may afford for a little time an easing of our pain; but there is none of the blessed compensation of laying hold on the joys of the life hid in God. The only return is a wearing, haunting sense of duty neglected, of God despised; a "fearful looking for of judgment." [5]

On the other hand, how blessed a service is ensured by full obedience to the divine command, as voiced in the Virgin Mother's words to the servants. It is a service, happy, indeed, because full of love.

If we love the Lord our God with all our heart, there will be no room for thoughts that disquiet; if we surrender wholly to Him, there will be no more strife within, but a fulness of "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." [6]

And if this service calls for sacrifice and suffering, in these shall we find our

[5] Heb. 10. 27. [6] Rom. 14. 17.

happiness, because they will be the very expression of our love; and love, where it lives at all, demands expression.

True love does not shrink from suffering, when it is for the sake of the beloved. A man will toil all the day long at some uncongenial labour, but his heart is light because he feels a thousandfold repaid by the smile that awaits him at home when the day's work is done, by the clasp of arms of the little child for love of whom the heaviest burden lies upon his heart but as a feather's weight.

III. The Practical Business of Life

This subject is not one, however, on which to theorize. It is, it ever must be, a practical everyday question. The command comes down to me across the centuries, as it came to the servants at Cana two thousand years ago, and the question to which I must seek an answer is: What is God commanding me to

do for Him this day? Is it a sin He would have me put away? Is it venial or mortal? Occasional or habitual? Satan, out of my life, my thoughts, my words and actions, is seeking to forge a chain. Day by day the links are fashioned; and it will not require many links to form the fetter that will bind me hand and foot. God desires me to lay these links, as one by one they are wrought, on the anvil of the opportunity that His love affords, and with the hammer of penitence to shatter them, that the chain may never be formed.

Or perhaps it is a work on the positive side of the Christian life, that He is commanding. My days are full of opportunity for doing good. This is to be the definite business of life, if I am ever to become like Him, "Who went about doing good."[1] The virtues of the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ are to be cultivated faithfully. I cannot be satisfied, so long as any thought finds

[1] Acts 10. 38.

place in my mind that could not have rested in His; so long as the word springs easily to my lips that I could not imagine Him speaking; so long as my actions have aught in their substance or their motive, that is unlike the spirit of His actions.

"Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." I have only to turn the pages of the Bible to find a thousand commands He lays upon me; but their multiplicity will not bewilder, the hardness of the saying will not distress, if I but remember that in love lies the fulfilling of the law.

Am I seeking day by day to love Him, praying, "O Jesus, I love Thee, and I want to love Thee more"? Am I working the works of love for my fellowmen? Little prayers of intercession for them; little deeds of kindness; gentle words that make for love and peace? We do not find pain in carrying out the wishes of those in this world whom we

love. The thought of the disapproval of some dear friend deters us from many things every day. When we learn to love our heavenly Friend as we love those on earth, then shall we be able, perhaps even without effort, and always with joy, to do whatsoever He saith.

In this obedience lies my vocation. The common duty of the moment is the divine call, coming to me in the fulness of time, revealing somewhat of God's eternal plan concerning me.

How the thought transfigures all life, all labour! This drudgery that no one has appreciated; this toil, day in and day out, that others took so easily for granted. It is indeed appreciated now; it will be appreciated eternally.

So link the utmost detail of your work with God. Count it as a thing divine. Bind it up with prayer, with acts of praise, with intercession for others. One recalls a letter from a soul dear to God who had hoped to give herself to

Him in some special way, had it been His will. At the end of a weary day she wrote: "Well, even if I have to write letters all day long about lumber, I can at least pray for the people to whom I write them."

And the vision came of a busy office in a tall building amid the clang and roar of a city's life, a temple for the worship of Mammon. But in one corner was an altar reared. To the outward eye it seemed but a table and a typewriter, clicking on hour after hour beneath the fingers of a tired girl; but as God and the Angels saw it, it stood a radiant shrine whence rose the perpetual incense of prayer from the heart of one who knew her vocation, whose spirit transformed the dullest task, stamped it with a quality divine, and wrought out of common things the eternal work of God.

CHAPTER VI

I. "Do It"

ACTION is the essential principle of the Christian life. No man is pleasing to God because He *can* be virtuous. He is pleasing to Him only in so far as he *is* virtuous in his concrete thoughts, words and actions. A Christian virtue not in action has been compared to a good sword that lies in its scabbard. If it is allowed to slumber there, it rusts.

In her command to the servants, the Blessed Mother allowed for no exception;—"*Whatsoever* He saith unto you." And to this all-inclusive expression, there were added words that gave life and point to the command, namely, "*Do it.*"

The form of the Greek word used by St. John is one of marked strength and

definiteness. It is a command to positive, prompt, and clear-cut action. Its force indicates that there will be no room for doubt as to what the action should be; and that their response must be given instantly. There must be no waiting to understand the general line He means to follow before proceeding with obedience. Each command, this or that, *whatsoever* He saith, must be obeyed on the moment. Such was the direction of the Blessed Virgin, and so did the servants understand and act.

"*Fill the waterpots with water,*" was His first command. They knew not wherefore, but there was no hesitation in their compliance; "*They filled them up to the brim.*" That done, the second direction came: "*Draw out now and bear unto the governor of the feast.*" And again, without question or delay, "*they bare it.*"

In all this they exemplified the fundamental principle of the service of God, a

principle to which we must give expression if day by day we would not make a failure of our life. The commands of God are not mere themes for meditation; they are not given merely that His wisdom may be manifested and admired; they are given as the basis of action, of work. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,"[1] and he who in obedience to the divine command, does not work the work of God, can have no part in the kingdom.

II. Fathoming the Counsels of God

Let us consider, in relation to ourselves, the suggestion in the Blessed Mother's words, that the soul will not be left in doubt as to the divine will.

The principle you lay down sounds well enough, some one objects; but it is not in accordance with human experience. As a matter of fact, earnest souls are constantly confronted with this very problem, and the effort to solve it is

[1] St. John 5. 17.

what constitutes the moral strain in the life of the Christian.

We want to do the divine will; we know there is no such thing as so-called conflicting duties. At every moment there is one definite thing that God means us to do, that and no other; and yet we are constantly plunged in doubt as to what it is.

It is rarely, if ever, that Satan tempts us baldly to violate God's will. Almost always there seems to be some modifying circumstance. We find ourselves arguing somewhat in this way: "Yes, I know the thing in itself is wrong; but circumstances alter cases; and, under these particular conditions, would it not be best?"

The strain comes most often in deciding just such questions as this. Abstract propositions of right and wrong are not often difficult of solution, but what racks the soul is to apply the principle to concrete cases as they arise in our daily life.

This objection is true, and yet it is true only because somewhere in the past we have in some measure failed to do the divine will where it was clearly set forth. Our Lord said to the doubting Jews in the temple, "If any man will to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine."[1]

This is not only a divine truth in the supernatural order, but it is also a divine law of human psychology; and it holds good not only in respect to the dogmatic teaching of Christ to which He here has special reference, but also to His will for us in our daily actions.

If we constantly study to conform our actions to the will of another, little by little we come to know that person's mode of thought and reasoning. We can divine instinctively what he would wish done under given conditions, for we have learned the lines upon which his mind operates.

This is a commonplace of ordinary life about us. The child accustomed to

[1] St. John 7. 17.

obey its mother, knows without reflection that she would be displeased at certain things, though she may never have mentioned or forbidden the particular acts.

The success of a business employee depends in a large measure on this principle. By long and faithful conformity he learns his employer's mode of thought, and can anticipate his attitude of mind toward almost any combination of business circumstances.

He who has schooled his own mind through definite, wilful acts of obedience to follow another's methods of reasoning becomes, in the best sense, an unconscious reflection of his mental mode, and it is this that constitutes the invaluable servant, whether in the work of modern trade, or in the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

There is another truth we must consider, namely, that where we are faithful in doing what God asks, God is, to

speak reverently, encouraged to reveal to us more of His will; to lead us on to a higher service.

This principle obtains in every business house in the land. The faithful employee is the one who is going to be trusted more and more by his employer. He will be taken more and more into his confidence. He will be told more and more of his plans, and will be given, when occasion arises, the opportunity of going on to some higher place in his service.

All this illustrates for us how God uses in the divine Kingdom the same principles which obtain in affairs of this world; in short, that what we call natural law is really divine law, and operates in both the natural and supernatural spheres.

Objections to these principles must never be permitted to find place in our minds, for it is a serious thing to dispute the assurances that God gives that

we shall not be left in doubt in these matters of eternal importance. The question we must ask ourselves is, Have I complied with the conditions? Have I been faithfully obedient in those points where there was no shade of doubt? Let us test ourselves in some simple particulars.

St. Paul, speaking by the Holy Ghost, said: "In every thing give thanks." Here is a clear, simple command. There is nothing complex or puzzling about it; there is no possible room for misunderstanding it. Furthermore, the apostle adds that "This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."[8]

Now have we complied with it? Last night, when I prayed, did I "in every thing give thanks"? Did I take even one brief minute to glance back over the day to bring to my memory the events for which I was commanded so clearly to thank God? And, further, did I thank Him for the unpleasant or disap-

[8] 1 Thes. 5. 18.

pointing incidents that occurred, remembering that our thanks are to be offered "in every thing," since nothing can enter our life (save sin, with which God has nothing to do), which He will not rule or overrule for our good?

If I find that I have failed in such a clear command, then I cannot complain if I find myself in ignorance of the mind of God. It is wholly my fault. The servants at Cana were not perplexed, because they obeyed fully and instantly.

III. The Perfecting of Human Judgment

We must not forget the part that prayer has to play in all this. In the Church's great Pentecostal prayer, we ask: "Grant us, by the same Spirit, to have a right judgment in all things." The faculty of human judgment is given us in order that we may be able to discern between right and wrong, and it

is by its exercise that we are to decide what is the will of God for us.

We are, however, so often made conscious that we have poor judgment; many failures have made us sensitive about doing that which our judgment, even after earnest prayer, dictates.

But in spite of all this, the course of the Christian soul is perfectly clear. A problem presents itself. We are at a loss to know what is the will of God for us. We turn to Him with the cry, "Grant us by thy Holy Spirit, to have a right judgment in all things."

We have prayed as earnestly as we could, and now we must act. The mind may still be racked with doubt, but we have referred it all to God, and we must believe that He will guide us. Therefore we act definitely, and without hesitation, using what judgment we have. It may be very poor at best, but it is all we have, and we enlist it in His service. Our prayer has been said, the time of

waiting is past; "Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward."[4] And so we move on to action, though through darkness and the deep of uncertainty, but the Holy Spirit is guiding us, and it were infidelity to Him to draw back now.

And what will the result be? Let that alone. Results belong to God, not to us. The issue may seem to be as great a failure as before, but if we have been as faithful as we could, God will take care of it all. Our judgment may prove to have been faulty, as we had feared, but there is no greater comfort than the thought that He does not hold us responsible for poor judgment.

He does, however, hold us to stern account for an earnest desire and intention. If the disappointing issue is no fault of our own at the time, men may count it failure, but God counts it success; for true success depends on wheth-

[4] Ex. 14. 15.

er or not we are pleasing to Him, and has nothing to do with the mere external result of the effort we have faithfully made to give Him a true and loving service.

We may have by nature a weak judgment in earthly things, but if we listen constantly for His voice, we shall in things spiritual, have more and more a judgment that will not err, because it will more and more be made one with the perfect human judgment of the Man Christ Jesus. He will tell us what to say and do, and what greater joy can there be than the divine assurance that we are daily becoming less liable to make a wrong decision in the affairs that are of eternal importance.

CHAPTER VII

I. The Command and the Gift

IT WAS not alone the miraculous power of Christ that effected the miracle at Cana. It was His power in co-operation with the obedience of the servants. He began with a command to them, and His gift was not forthcoming, no miracle was performed, until the command had been complied with. Not that His power in itself was conditioned by anything they could do, but because God has made it a condition of helping man, that he should do something to help himself. He not only works, but requires us to be workers together with Him.

In all His miracles, this principle is to be noted, and the command is always such as calls forth faith. He instructs the servants to "fill the waterpots with

water," an apparently aimless proceeding. To the man with the withered hand, He says: "Stretch forth thine hand,"[1] which was the humanly impossible thing he desired most of all to do. He commands the paralytic: "Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk."[2] The lepers, white with their dreadful disease, He commands: "Go shew yourselves unto the priests,"[3] and they went, not knowing how it was possible that they should not be driven away with loathing and violence when they sought to pass the city gates. Even the very dead He commands: "I say unto thee, arise."[4]

The miracle at Cana, in common with so many other of His works, was a type of His method of dealing with men in the work of their salvation. They were to have their part. The Church in all ages, and each minister and member

[1] St .Matt. 12. 13. [3] St. Luke 17. 14.
[2] St. Mark 2. 9. [4] St. Luke 7. 14.

thereof, were to have their particular work assigned, and until each had performed his part, the Kingdom could not be complete. During His earthly life, gracious and marvellous as were His works, He only "*began* both to do and teach,"[5] He began it, doing the most essential parts without which no works could avail, but He left it so that the plan would not be consummated until men had made their response.

Let us not make a mistake here concerning works. A man can no more be justified by works alone than he can by faith alone. Works without faith as an offering to God are a presumptuous mockery of Him, while "faith without works is dead." The two must operate together as in the case of Abraham, where "faith wrought with his works."[6] Our faith and works taken together are our contribution toward finishing that which in the days of His earthly pilgrimage, Jesus began to do. He began

[5] Acts 1. 1. [6] St. James 2. 20, 22.

the work of my salvation when He came into the world. He finished His part when on the Cross He cried, "*Consummatum est.*"[7] It is left for me to lay hold on so great salvation.

Daily we must, through the exercise of the strength He gives, "Work out our own salvation with fear and trembling";[8] making "our calling and election sure";[9] "laying up for ourselves treasures in heaven."[10]

The part which we are to play is not only that of entering the service of Christ once for all by the acts of will and obedience whereby in Baptism we are made one with Him. The servants at Cana were commanded to do more than one thing before the miracle was complete. So, day by day, as our Lord has new gifts of grace to bestow, new miracles to work in our hearts, He demands an ever renewed and an ever increasing contribution on our part.

[7] St. John 19. 30. [9] 2 St. Peter 1. 10.
[8] Phil. 2. 12. [10] St. Matt. 6. 20.

Nowhere does St. Paul give greater praise than to the Thessalonians for their "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." [11] Yet in the work they are doing which is so pleasing to God, he adjures them to "abound more and more," and in their love of the brethren to "increase more and more." [12]

The divine command is, "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"; [13] but God does not require that this perfection should be reached immediately. It is a long, slow process with most of us. We perceive God's will for us in some affair, and faithfully perform it. By this we lay hold of a grace, a new adornment of the soul, a new access of strength; we make one step forward in our work of attaining the perfect likeness of Christ.

So, day by day, as we have His will progressively revealed in a hundred lit-

[11] 1 Thess. 1. 3. [12] 1 Thess. 4. 1, 10. [13] St. Matt. 5. 48.

tle things, we are able to claim for ourselves corresponding graces. And so the great miracle of our salvation and perfection goes on through the years.

II. The Terms of Salvation

There is one great difference between the servants at Cana and ourselves. They knew not the purpose our Lord had in giving them His commands, while we know very definitely what He has in view. It is our sanctification."[14] He has in His Gospel outlined for us the plan He has formulated, and has made it clear what our part is.

If this is indeed clear to our minds, then how earnestly should we strive to do the things that He commands! No soul can lie down supine and inert, and say, "I will do nothing but yield myself to God that He may save me." There was much of this kind of theology in past generations, but in our own day such false notions rarely raise their

[14] 1 Thess. 4. 3.

heads. True, we are totally incapable of doing anything as of ourselves. "Without Thee, we are not able to please Thee," [15] but along with this truth must be held the complementary one that God has willed to save no man without the co-operation of his will and his work. The Christian warfare is a strenuous service. Every faculty and talent have to be employed. The man who allows any faculty to become dormant is preparing himself to share the fate of the servant who buried his Lord's talent.[16]

Some of us have perhaps used a prayer attributed to Archbishop Fenelon: "Lord, take my heart, for I cannot give it Thee, and when Thou hast it, keep it, for I cannot keep it for Thee; and save me in spite of myself." It sounds humble and pious, and doubtless has helped certain souls, but it contains a fundamental error. God never saved

[15] Collect for 19th Sunday after Trinity.
[16] St. Matt. 25. 14-30.

any man in spite of himself. So far from this, we can be sure that He never saved any man except because of himself; because of the use he made of his talents for the divine glory.

Our salvation, and the measure of our glory in heaven, depend on the zeal with which we do His service. This does not mean the mere outward activity which has been so great a snare to many souls. It may be a zeal burning in the silence of prayer and contemplation; but it is all one if it means the bringing of every thought and purpose into obedience to Him.[17] Let this thought of working out our own salvation under the direction of divine grace dominate all our purposes, and then will life have a definite aim from which there will be no swerving. Everything, even the least, will be regarded as valuable or worthless, according as it helps or hinders us in our prog-

[17] 2 Cor. 10. 5.

ress toward God. Then shall we be able to share the stern joy of the spirit that cries:

> "For I intend to get to God,
> For 'tis to God I speed so fast,
> For in God's breast, mine own abode,
> Those shoals of dazzling glory passed,
> I lay my spirit down at last." [18]

III. My Brother's Keeper

It is not our own salvation only that we are to work out. Others are to come constantly within the range of our regard. The servants at Cana co-operated with our Lord in a miracle of which they were not the beneficiaries, and the greater part of the work God has for us to do for Him is on behalf of others.

In fact, being what we are, "members one of another," [19] it is difficult to imagine any action which does not seriously affect others, leading them nearer to, or driving them further from, God. You arise some morning in a happy, thank-

[18] Browning, *Johannes Agricola in Meditation.*
[19] Eph. 4. 25.

ful spirit; you look out at God's sweet sunshine, and are filled with gratitude that He lets you live. You go down to breakfast in this frame, and how much are you able to do for others by your spirit of cheerfulness!

Perhaps someone there began the day with a cloud on his heart, but the cheering sunshine of your smile drove away the lowering shadows, and in a little while he forgot his gloom, and without knowing how it came about, found himself light of spirit, and went on his way scattering smiles and cheerful words, which in their turn brought light to many hearts.

When we come to consider life and all its complex relationships, we perceive that scarcely any circumstance can arise that does not give us opportunity to work with God for the help of those about us. There is scarcely anything that makes us realize more fully that

we are in all things our brother's keeper.

The smile brought to the breakfast table drove away perhaps an occasion for irritation and peevishness of spirit. If this were so, then surely I was that morning made the keeper of my brother's temper. I stop for a moment on the street to soothe a child who is sobbing from some passing grief. As I see the tears cease, and the smiles come back, then surely I know that God for a little time has made me the keeper of the joy of a little child's heart.

It is equally true in the deeper aspects of life. We can never know in this world how much the salvation of those about us depends on us; on the word we may speak in season, of warning or encouragement; on the example of our own words and acts; and, above all, on the prayers we pray for others. Are we keeping these things in mind day by day?

If not, if in our selfishness we think only of ourselves, how can we expect to work along with God, how can we expect to have our part in the miracles He is daily performing in human life as it lies about us? There are sad hearts to be soothed; downcast spirits to be cheered and enheartened; lives which know not the strength and joy of the wine of the divine grace. He looks to us as He looked to the servants at Cana to work with Him that these souls, so precious in His sight, may have the blessing He has prepared for them.

What have I done today, what can I do tomorrow, to help Christ work a miracle of love in some darkened soul?

CHAPTER VIII

I. A Principle of Power

THE command that our Lord gave the servants must have seemed to them the height of folly.

"There were set there," we are told, *"six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews."* They were not to hold water for drinking purposes, but were placed there to give supply for the frequent washings that the Jews were accustomed to make. It was near the end of the feast and the pots were empty.

"Fill the waterpots with water," commanded our Lord.

The servants did as they were bade, wondering perhaps what it meant, but holding in mind the Blessed Mother's admonition. Then came the next command:

"Draw out now and bear unto the governor of the feast."

"What! Serve the master of the feast, and the guests, with water from these wash-pots! It would be as much as our places are worth. We should be driven from the house with angry indignation."

The command, from every standpoint of common sense and human wisdom, must have seemed foolish in the extreme.

But here the influence of the Blessed Mother entered. Had she not told them, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it"? She admitted no sort of qualification. They could not forget the command which was so sure, and which told of a faith that staggered at nothing. It must be done. Without hesitation they obeyed.

A great modern teacher has said, "Faith is a principle of power."[1] It in-

[1] B. F. Westcott, *The Historic Faith*, p. 10.

deed proved so at Cana. The Blessed Virgin's word had power with the servants because they saw how deep and mighty was her faith. It may for a moment have occurred to them to refer to her again before obeying. But if such a thought suggested itself, it was dismissed promptly. They could not doubt that she must have been justified in her sweeping instructions.

How often in the history of the world, even in that which is false, has faith given a power to men that could not be resisted. Mahomet swept millions into his train, changing them from scoffers into blind, reckless enthusiasts for the new doctrine. False as he was, they could not resist the magnificent fanatical faith he had in his own mission.

Our age is one of indifference to the Church's Faith, but, by one of those paradoxes so common in human life,

there was perhaps never a time when man had a more intense desire to believe in something.

The indifference of the age has been created by the weak faith of Christians. There is no power in us because we lack faith. Men refuse to believe in a Christ whom all admire, but whom few follow with any reality, and for whom none is willing to suffer. We speak of Him with no burning words of unflinching faith as would sweep men away, and make them feel He must be true.

The servants at Cana hesitated not at what seemed a foolish command, because the faith of the Mother of Jesus had power to convince them. Christ crucified is to men today, as in the olden time, foolishness. They are not convinced, because Christians fail to show strong faith in Him by their life, and words, and works.

II. The False Apologetic

It did not seem to occur to the Blessed Mary that anyone could possibly doubt Him. Much of the teaching of Christianity today begins with suggesting an array of objections. We take it for granted that men will not believe. We bring a great weight of argument to bear on disputed points of the Faith, when in so many cases the inquiring soul feels only a pathetic longing to find something to which it can anchor. It comes to us for the bread of divine truth, and we give it a stone of vague philosophic argument which confuses the mind, and increases spiritual distress instead of allaying it.

Even when men come demanding proof, it is in many instances but a mask for the hunger for higher things that is eating out their hearts. If we have so little insight into human nature as not to realize this, we shall be of little help

to souls about us. If we have spiritual strength and balance enough gently to put aside the argument without trying to meet it, and come straight to the fundamental point of that soul's personal relation to Christ, we shall find ourselves able to give a help that all our arguments could never afford.

Let us not be deceived when men say they have intellectual difficulties about the Faith. Those who have had experience with souls testify that such difficulties are rare, though men frequently hide behind the pretence that they are real. With a gentle hand of loving sympathy strip away the mask, and come straight to the one thing needful, and in many cases it will be found that there is no difficulty to be removed, but a yearning to be met; that what is desired is not an intellectual argument, but the simple, all-satisfying Bread of Life.

We live in an intellectual age, and imagine that because the men and

women we meet seem intellectual, they require an intellectual answer to their questions. Many a soul of which we little suspect it, many an one who would not acknowledge it, is sick and wearied with the intellectual. What they long for is rest and peace; and if we could listen to their hearts, we should hear them crying in the darkness:

"I have a life in Christ to live,
I have a death in Christ to die;
And must I wait till science give
All doubts a full reply?

"Nay, rather while the sea of doubt
Is raging wildly round about,
Questioning of life and death and sin,
Let me but creep within
Thy fold, O Christ! and at Thy feet
Take but the lowest seat."[1]

Much of modern unbelief is the result of our apologetic tone. The Blessed Mother knew no such attitude. It appears rarely in the Apostolic preaching, and it is significant that the few apolo-

[1] Principal Shairp.

getic sermons we have in the Acts of the Apostles bore but little fruit.

The sermon of St. Stephen before the Sanhedrim converted no one, but the yielding of his life in simple, resolute faith, drove the truth deep into the heart of the Church's greatest persecutor, and was the first step in changing Saul from the ravening wolf into the strong and gentle pastor of God's flock.

The defence the Apostle made before Festus and Agrippa had but little weight, but at midnight in the dungeon at Philippi, the straight, strong, unargued declarations of Christian faith and duty, brought the hardened jailer and his household to their knees begging for Baptism. Apologetics are valuable to maintain the faith of believers, but few unbelievers are won by their use.

It is at best a poor warfare that is waged constantly on the defensive; and nothing gives more strength and assurance than to throw the burden of proof

on the enemy. After all the splendid centuries of Christianity, after all that the world knows, and must reckon with, of Christ present and all-powerful, reigning in His Church, it is late in the day for us to be called upon to prove the truth of His mission. Demand that men shall take the truth of God for granted, and utter a challenge not less strong because full of love. Defy objectors to prove the contrary. Stand squarely on this principle, move straight forward, and the force of your confidence will break down the opposition, and those who had come out to strive will be shamed into silence if not led into faith.

Often do we see men, ignorant and unlearned, who have a far-reaching spiritual influence among their fellows. They have neither the mind nor the learning to understand or produce an argument, but they present what they conceive to be the truth straight from the heart, and

with so great a faith that men cannot choose but hear.

If Christian teachers and preachers would, in the spirit of the Mother of God, tell men in simple fashion the story of Jesus, how He loved, and wrought, and suffered; if they would drop negative arguments, and present the Sacraments and the revelation of the dogmatic faith of the Catholic Church, the preaching of the Gospel instead of precipitating bitterness and controversy, and consequent unbelief, would cause men to fall on their knees crying, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"[8]

III. Casting the Burden on the Lord

The Blessed Mother having given her directions to the servants, seems to have gone about some other duty, considering the thing she desired as good as done.

[8] Acts 2. 37.

In other words, she did not worry. It is, as the proverb says, worry that kills, and worry always indicates a lack of faith in God.

There is perhaps no gift that so marks the infinite condescension of God to His creatures, as does faith, for it is the gift given to man by which he may have the means of testing the Father. In time of trial He says: "Here is the gift of faith. Use it and try Me. Drive far dull care; leave the cause to Me, and see what the result will be."

We take Him at His word. With a forced act of the will, it may be, we bring the spirit of cheerfulness into our hearts, and, having prayed, leave the trouble with Him, and in the end we realize that in His own way and time, He brings the matter to the happiest issue.

Thus by using our faith we increase it, for when the next occasion arises, having already proved to ourselves that

God is not slack concerning His promises, we find it easier to trust Him; there is less temptation to be careful and troubled, because, like the Blessed Mother, having cast our burden on Him, we are happy and content, knowing that by the direction of His love and power "all things work together for good to them that love God.'[4]

[4] Rom. 8. 28.

CHAPTER IX

I. Filling the Waterpots

OUR LORD did not create the wine out of nothing. Nor did He work His miracle without the help of others. In these two circumstances He demonstrated a fundamental principle underlying the laws of His Kingdom. Having created His universe, He never goes outside of it for either His agents or His materials. He uses what He finds at hand.

The man who would seek a blessing from God must have something to offer, for as we have already seen, God expects him to do his part. As men think of the greatness of the work as it is seen when God has finished it, and realize in some measure how infinitely out of proportion to the whole their contribution is, there comes very naturally a shrinking from doing anything. It seems a

presumption to try to co-operate with God when what we can do amounts to so little.

Here, however, is another principle on which God works. He never demands great things. He is willing to use just what we have, provided we offer it in a spirit of humble love.

When we analyze it, we see that it is pride that makes us hesitate to present our little offering. Pride, too, of a most presumptuous type, for when we draw back on this account, it amounts to saying that God can do but little because my offering is small. In other words, I condition God's power by my weakness. I intimate that He might be able to do something that would indeed be worthy, if I could offer Him something great with which to work.

How hard it is for us to remember that His strength finds its fullest opportunity in our weakness.[1] The fact that my offering is of the meagerest makes

[1] 2 Cor. 12. 9.

it more likely that God can use it to the utmost, because in the little, humble offering there is small room for pride.

Even from the most natural and human point of view it would have been ridiculous for the widow to have prided herself on the two mites she dropped into the temple treasury. The very smallness of the gift was her protection, and removed the possibility of pride; but because it was all she had, and was given in whole-hearted, humble love, our Lord declared her to have "cast in more than they all."[2]

II. "Up to the Brim"

A still higher lesson is given us here not only by our Lord and His holy Mother, but by the servants. They were commanded to fill the waterpots with water, and so earnestly and carefully, and in such high degree did they comply with the command, that the Holy Spirit

[2] St. Luke 21. 3.

inspires the Evangelist to make special mention of the particularity of their obedience. *"They filled them,"* he declares, *"up to the brim."*

They were not content with merely filling them in the generally understood sense of the word. They did their very utmost, and he who would show a genuine love for God and His service must profit by their example.

The really earnest soul will never be content with an obedience that will merely pass muster. He scorns the spirit that does just enough to keep within the pale of God's favour, and is therewith satisfied. He realizes that the man who is content with such low form of service, serves without love. He is not spurred on by the desire to honour God; he is unmoved by the thought of the joy of pleasing his heavenly Father. The first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer mean nothing on the lips of such a man. In short, he serves God with a

selfish motive. He has regard to the terrors of hell, and desires to escape them; and this escape reasonably ensured, he would do no more.

But the soul that has by the touch of the wounded Hand of Christ been kindled with love, is not governed by the thought of the terrors of hell. True, he never deceives himself with the assurance that he is safe from peril. He knows his own weakness and worthlessness too well for that. But he serves his Lord because he loves his Lord, not because he would consult his own comfort and escape punishment. In other words, he gives the good God a full, glad and generous service, serving for love and not for hire. He fills the waterpots "up to the brim."

Is it too much to say that the great majority of Christians we meet in the world are those who are content to keep merely within the pale of grace, whose chief aim in serving God is to escape

punishment, who never fill their water-pots "up to the brim"? In such peril do these souls place themselves that it seems hardly possible that they should escape mortal sin from time to time. They leave so narrow a margin between themselves and serious falls, that, human nature being what it is, it is almost inevitable that they should go down beneath the assaults of the Tempter.

Let us then flee a mercenary service. The man who emulates the servants at Cana must serve God primarily neither from hope of reward nor fear of punishment, but because love constrains him.

He who follows this principle will aim at the highest things, and aiming high he will attain to some high thing even though it be not that which he set out to reach.

III. The Water Made Wine

Water is a simple, natural element. Wine, into which this water was to be

converted, is the product of many and complex processes. Here we have the types of our work in the Kingdom, and of that which God performs. Man plants the vine; God sends the gracious rains. Each has its function, all working under the divine law of nature; and slowly the ripening clusters are perfected until their perfume is a benediction upon the autumn hills. Crushed in the press, the ruddy juice lies seething in the vats, until it is drawn off, precious wine to make glad the heart of man.[8]

We fill the waterpots with water. We do the simple thing, the little duty that is called for daily. It may be so slight an action that it could hardly be conceived of as having any place in the world's great life as in its manifold phases it is developing about us. But it is our contribution; it is all we can do; and God takes it, and marvellously does He work with it.

[8] Psalm 104. 15.

It was perhaps only a word, a smile, a grip of the hand; but there was love in it, and the power of that love can never die. The echo of that kindly word is caught up in voice after voice; the sunshine of that smile is flashed from heart to heart; the pressure of the loving, sympathetic hand will be felt by friendless ones long after we are gone and by all the world forgot.

It is a splendid thought! The little impulse of good that we can liberate starts, under the divine direction, on its glorious march through all the coming ages. It gathers force as it proceeds, and when we come to be judged of the deeds done in the body, it will be there to testify on our behalf, with all the multitude of loving, righteous things that it swept into its train as it made its progress through the world. Thus does God take the water of our simple offering, and change it into the rich wine of the Kingdom.

One characteristic of love is that it is essentially active. It must work as fire must burn. If the divine love is really in our hearts, even unconsciously we shall do our part and the divine energy of the Holy Spirit will be set in motion. No more precious parable of this can perhaps be found outside of Holy Writ than Browning gives in "Pippa Passes." We remember the little peasant girl, escaped for a single day from the drudgery of the silk mills, the one holiday of all the year, "that lightens the next twelve months' toil." Out into the brimming day she passes, singing as she goes:

"The year's at the spring,
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hillside's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in His heaven,—
All's right with the world!"

The clear tones of the young voice, trembling with its innocent love and

gratitude to the dear God Who gives her this joyous day, ring out across the morning. Men catch the note; they stop to hearken. Evil spells are broken; pure loves awaken; high aspirations flame in hearts that had been weak. Pippa passes. She goes on to the joy of her day, conscious of nothing save of God, His goodness and her own happiness. It was so little; only the carolling of a heart that loved God. She did not know it, but the blessing of that morning was that she had filled her waterpots with water.

When the drudgery of life is done, and the eternal holiday breaks, many will be there who did God's work by simply loving Him and letting that love flow in joyous current as they went through the world with songs in their hearts.

IV. The Reward of the Work

We know that apart from God we can do nothing,[1] but perhaps we have never realized sufficiently the worth of that which is done in union with Him.

The value of an article is always in proportion to the value of its product, and when we find a high price set on some device we assume that the work it does is of large worth. Let us apply this to the human soul and its work, remembering that the worth of a thing is represented by the price paid for it by those who have an intelligent understanding of values. What price was paid for the human soul? Nothing less than the infinite price of the life of the Incarnate Son of God; and it was paid by Him Whose understanding and knowledge of all values is perfect. Surely there is a potential value about the human soul so great that our minds cannot grasp the difference between it and

[1] St. John 15. 5.

infinity. What then is the value of the work God has for us to do for Him if He so willingly paid the infinite price of His own life for the soul that is to perform the service?

We cannot press the inquiry. It is a thought whose significance staggers the imagination. God wants *me*. He has something for *me* to do for Him. Not alone the poor, marred offering I can make Him here, for this life is but the apprenticeship of the great life that lies beyond.

All He asks here is that I do what I can, fill my waterpots; and out yonder in the heavenly life where the blessed ones "rest not day and night,"[1] from His perfect service, I shall find the permanent place God intended for me when He made me. What that work will be, I know not, for "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love

[1] Rev. 4. 8.

Him."* One thing I know; so important is the work appointed for me that in order to win me to Himself that I might do it, He gave the life of His only begotten Son.

And what shall the reward be? Let us find the answer in a story that comes to us from Flanders, which men through six centuries have loved to tell.

Certain monks were one day in their convent garden, and as they walked in its quiet shades they spoke of the promises made to those who through their earthly pilgrimage should bear the Cross of Christ. To one, most blessed was the promise of reigning with Him; another dwelt upon the ecstasy of the Beatific Vision; still another, who had laboured long and hard in the vineyard of the Lord, spoke sweetly of the rest that remaineth for the people of God. A young boy walked among them, a fair-faced novice of fourteen years, Thomas of Kempen, by name. Seeing a look of

*1 Cor. 2. 9.

wondrous sweetness on the child's face, one of the old men asked: "To thee, little brother, what promise of our Lord doth seem most sweet?" The boy looked up, and on his face was the light that shines through all the pages of the "Imitation." His voice rang clear and true through the quiet cloister: "To me, O Father, beyond all the joys most dear, is this: 'And His servants shall serve Him.'"[1]

[1] Rev. 22. 3.

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